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As new attorneys enter the profession something to think about

Soon to be our newest Illinois lawyers will trade their backpacks for briefcases at the upcoming Nov. 9 admission ceremonies. In their academic years, they have had many questions and strived to find the answers. They will have many more.

As for right now, they are in a transition point — from law student to law professional. Yet, their education and advancement will continue.

This time last year I watched more than 1,000 soon-to-be Illinois attorneys pour into the Arie Crown Theater along with their family and friends. Other lawyers did the same around the state, from Elgin to Carbondale. They left the venues as newly minted attorneys after taking an oath to the profession and to the responsibilities afforded to those in the legal profession.

A new chapter began for them, as it will for this next generation. As this new group of attorneys embark on their journeys, they must keep an elevated level of competence and professionalism to best serve themselves, their clients and the rule of law. And while that responsibility will be reaffirmed again by their oath, it started for many of them three years prior.

Repeat after me

A Pledge of Professionalism is administered to law students in their first year of law school if they attended an Illinois-based school. At that time, as ILs on the cusp of their legal education, they all acknowledged and accepted the privileges and responsibilities inherent in the study of law and becoming a lawyer.

They willfully embraced the high standards and ideals demanded of the legal profession and made the commitment to treat their colleagues and adversaries alike with the same integrity, professionalism and civility as was expected from them.

Now, with their law degrees in hand and after successful passage of the bar exam, these professionals join every lawyer in Illinois who has taken an oath to the constitutions of the United States

and the state of Illinois and to the rule of law.

They now have the knowledge, the privilege and the license to serve the ends of justice without prejudice. To diligently serve their clients with integrity and good faith. To remain a zealous advocate while acting with courtesy, civility, integrity and cooperation toward others, as the bounds of the law allows.

Illinois Supreme Court Justice Anne M. Burke emphasized these commitments in her comments to the newly admitted attorneys during last year's 1st District admission ceremony. Burke spoke of how to maintain civility as an officer of the court would serve to enrich their careers. And by respecting the opposing counsel, our clients, the court and, ultimately, for the rule of law, they would expand their knowledge of what a professional is.

"Trust, honor, peace, truth and justice. These values, which we hold dear, are simple," she continued, "but they are not always easy to uphold. And as a lawyer, you will be confronted with challenges and temptations. The strength of your character will be tested. Difficult choices will have to be made. What you choose will define you — as a person and as a lawyer. It also will reflect on the profession as a whole. ...

"It is my belief that a legal degree is two things — it is an obligation to help others and a medium by which that assistance can be bestowed. So from today forward, I challenge each of you to apply your many talents and fulfill your responsibility. Take pro bono cases. Participate in your local bar associations. And push them to assist charitable institutions. And use your practice to work for equality and justice.

Find a mentor, trust a mentor

Burke concluded her remarks by directing all new Illinois attorneys to participate in the Supreme Court's Lawyer-to-Lawyer Mentoring Program, administered by the Commission on Professionalism. She praised it for being one of the finest, ambitious



As professionalism counsel at the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Professionalism, Mark C. Palmer promotes civility and delivers professionalism programming, including the commission's mentoring program, across Illinois to lawyers and law students with a dedication to the quality of justice and the rule of law.

and innovative in the country.

The court recognizes that as you begin your careers having a skilled and experienced mentor can help you with the transition from law student to member of the bar. To assist you with this transition, the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Professionalism has partnered with law firms, law schools, bar associations and other organizations throughout Illinois to administer the statewide mentoring program.

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Beyond your professional development, completion of the commission's mentoring program satisfies the new lawyers' basic skills requirement as well as six hours of professionalism responsibility under the Continuing Legal Education requirement at no cost (for mentees and mentors).

Furthermore, completion of the program satisfies the amended Rule 794 requirement for attorneys to take one hour of diversity and inclusion CLE and one hour of mental health and substance

abuse CLE as part of their six-hour professional responsibility requirement.

With the success of the mentoring program in the past six years, the commission is currently exploring two pilot mentoring programs to further promote these goals in Illinois. An underrepresented attorney pilot hopes to expand diversity and inclusion in our profession using a curriculum module with a targeted focus on underrepresented attorneys and their retention and advancement in organizations.

Additionally, a career transition pilot aspires to mentor attorneys transitioning from a work environment outside a private law firm (e.g. government, corporate) into a law firm setting, especially as a solo practitioner or in a small firm.

While these groups of lawyers may not always be new lawyers in their first five years of practice, they nevertheless desire the guidance and advice a mentor can impart on them.

The yearlong program rewards both the mentee and the mentor, as they both reaffirm their commitment to their profession. The program's unique curriculum traces the five tenants of professional responsibility — professionalism, ethics, civility, diversity and inclusion, and wellness, mental health and addiction.

Burke went on to highlight that professional and personal friendships often develop, further adding to the integrity of the practice of law and a sense of community among the bar.

All new attorneys should have the opportunity to find a supportive mentor as they embark on their legal careers. Please join me in this endeavor: I join Justice Burke in saying I hope you love the law as much as I do and take to heart your commitment to the morality of law, its values and standards.

For more information about participation as a mentee or mentor in the Supreme Court's mentoring program or the pilot mentoring programs, contact the author or visit 2civility.org.